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Roth Conference on Rebound; Billy Idol

FINANCE: '80s rocker said to be headlining; attendees up from '09

■ By MURRAY COLEMAN

Newport Beach-based Roth Capital Partners LLC opens its yearly three-day Roth Orange County Growth Stock Conference in Dana Point today with more global flavor and an eye on better economic times.

Roth Capital, the county's largest independent investment bank, expects more than 1,500 investors from hedge funds, mutual funds and large corporate investment groups to gather at the Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel.

Another 1,000 people representing 365 presenting companies are expected, according to Ted Roth, the company's managing director of business development.

"About 90 of the 365 presenting companies are coming from China, which is up almost 50% from last year," he said.

That could translate into more business for local hotels and restaurants. A typical contingent from China is larger than those of regional or national companies taking part in the conference, according to Roth.

More visitors from Europe and Asia also are expected at this year's event, he said.

The conference has become known as much for its entertainment as presenting companies. Sources familiar with the conference said 1980s rocker Billy Idol is the entertainment headliner on Tuesday night.

Roth declined to say who is performing.

Newport Beach-based chipmaker Conexant Systems Inc. is making its first appearance at the conference since 2007.

The company is undergoing a restructuring to clean up its balance sheet. Earlier this month, Conexant sold nearly \$250 million worth of bonds and stock to pay off debt due in 2026.

Chief Executive Scott Mercer is set to present at the conference.

"This event is especially important to us and comes at a great time," Conexant spokeswoman Gwen Carlson said. "We



Idol: expected to play Tuesday night

want to share our story and highlight the progress we've made. We've completed our major operational restructuring, and we've just started a new financial restructuring plan."

Irvine-based medical device maker Masimo Corp. is set to make its second appearance at the conference after debuting last year.

The conference is a good forum to "dis-



Prior conference: about 2,500 people expected this week

cuss our recent performance and share our growth strategy with a broad cross-section of institutional investors," Chief Financial Officer Mark de Raad said.

The conference is on the rebound this year.

In early 2009, the troubled economy damped participation. About a fourth fewer institutional investors attended and about half as many companies—200—made presentations in 2009, according to Roth.

"Market conditions are better this year and that's helping to create more interest from institutional investors," he said.

At this time last year, money managers were seeing big runs on their funds.

"This year, they're more comfortable with money flows," Roth said. "So they're more focused on opportunities."

That makes the mood different this year. "We're expecting a much more offensive-minded conference," Roth said.

Workshops are set to focus on sectors seen as having potential for big growth for small and midsize public companies.

Two areas of emphasis are energy and healthcare, according to Roth.

"We have much more emphasis on healthcare this year with nearly 100 companies in that sector making presentations," he said. "We're also going to have more larger-cap semiconductor companies than in the past."

Those include a couple of regional biggies: Irvine-based Broadcom Corp. and San Diego's Qualcomm Inc.

Besides company presentations, a workshop today focuses on giving chief financial officers more ideas about raising money, complying with regulations and dealing with changing valuations on mergers and acquisitions.

On Tuesday, workshops center on trends for initial public offerings. Executives considering an offering in the next 12 to 24 months are expected to be given suggestions on the least expensive and most effective ways to do so, according to Roth.

Bryan Gadol, a partner in the Irvine office of Minneapolis-based law firm Dorsey & Whitney LLP, said he's looking forward to the event as a "great opportunity to meet and share ideas with other industry professionals and company executives."

A larger contingent of participants from other countries and across the U.S. should help raise recognition of the county, according to Roth.

"We've heard of a number of occasions where visitors to the conference have liked Orange County so much that they've come back for vacations," he said. "In some cases, we've heard of people buying second homes here after being introduced to OC through this event. At least from a tourism standpoint, the conference provides more visibility for the county." ■